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## **Why a Book Club?**

Book clubs are a fun social activity and a nice way to stay familiar with the latest books. They are also a good tool for creating community, addressing specific ideas or topics, and introducing Jewish texts.

Book clubs are comfortable environments in which people are free to engage with one another in a way that is rare in daily life. They present participants with the opportunity to incorporate their own views and experiences into a shared central theme and contribute to a larger discussion while developing relationships with fellow readers (and possibly while enjoying a snack or some wine, too). Book clubs inspire participants to read and think, share ideas, respond to the ideas of others, and start new conversations – and they can be on any topic.

Here is a short guide on how to go about setting up a book club or a single book discussion.

## **Book Club 1-2-3**

The fundamentals of setting up a book club are easy: Gather some participants/friends, read a book/excerpt, and discuss.

While this basic formula will work, it's a bit oversimplified and setting up a successful book discussion will require slightly more planning.

### **1. Establish your mission and parameters**

Identifying your mission and goal(s) will help determine the best way to structure and lead your conversation.

- What is your goal for this book club?
  - Offering a fun leisure activity
  - Creating community
  - Addressing a specific topic, issue or theme
  - Introducing Jewish texts/literature

- Will people read in advance or at the session?
- Will the book be sold/distributed through your organization or purchased individually by participants?
- How many people are you expecting?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 1-10</li> <li>○ 10-20</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 20-40</li> <li>○ more than 40</li> </ul>
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## 2. Select a book

This year's [Global Day of Jewish Learning](#) is Sunday, November 16, 2014. The theme is Heroes and Villains, Saints and Fools: The People in the Book. This involves exploring biblical characters. We provide questions for the book, *Biblical Images* by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz, as well as for one of its chapters, "Sarah: The Partner".

Decide for your group whether it makes more sense to encourage everyone to read the book beforehand or to read the chapter when they arrive at the program.

## 3. Designate a discussion leader

The leader is responsible for managing the conversation – calling on speakers, preventing interruptions, keeping focus, etc. – and, optionally, for providing context or an introduction to the book. The leader should come prepared with a few questions to get the conversation started and to keep it running without any awkward breaks (and to guide the discussion if you are addressing specific issues). Below we offer some questions to help the leader.

For more book club resources or for assistance in planning a book club event and/or starting an ongoing book club, visit [www.jewishbookcouncil.org/bookclub](http://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/bookclub) or email Miri at [miri@jewishbooks.org](mailto:miri@jewishbooks.org).

Option: Entire Book: *Biblical Images*  
Suggested Discussion Questions

1. What did you learn that stayed with you after closing the book?
2. Which chapter stands out the most for you? Why?
3. Did reading this book change your perspective in any way? Do you view any of the biblical characters differently? Did any familiar stories take on a new meaning?
4. Was there a character(s) who you identified with after reading his/her/their chapter? Which aspects of the story were particularly interesting to you? Was there a character profiled in the book with whom you identified before reading *Biblical Images*? If so, how did this affect your perception of him/her?
5. Rabbi Steinsaltz explains that each chapter is an elaboration of one aspect of each character. If you could choose one character (listed in the book or not) to explore in the same way, who would it be? And what aspect would you like to examine?
6. Did you see similarities between characters? Was there a theme that appeared in multiple character portraits? If yes, what were the similarities?
7. Were there any character assessments with which you particularly agreed or disagreed?
8. In the introduction, Rabbi Steinsaltz writes, "Scriptural style is almost always objective and distant....The narrative is also as factual as possible, with no attempt to penetrate the psyche of the characters or to analyze their motives....It is this almost dry style that gives the biblical story its impact" (p xii). Do you agree or disagree with this? Why?
9. Rabbi Steinsaltz's profiles humanize the characters in the Bible, pointing out their complexities, virtues and flaws. Is this how you generally think of biblical characters? Does thinking of them as "real people" rather than distant figures change your reading of the Bible? Does it make it more positive? How?
10. According to Rabbi Steinsaltz, the "personages in this book have therefore a dual significance. They are biblical-historical characters and also archetypal figures in some way relevant to the inner life of the modern individual, and to modern society and politics as well" (p xv). Do you agree that these characters are relevant to modern life? How?

Option: Reading an Excerpt  
Sarah: The Partner

1. Rabbi Steinsaltz's chapter on Sarah focuses on her partnership with Abraham. Was this something that you had previously noticed? Now that you've read the chapter, how has your perspective on Sarah changed?
2. Rabbi Steinsaltz mentions that Abraham and Sarah's relationship echoes that of Adam and Eve (p 19). What similarities and differences do you see?
3. Does Abraham and Sarah's partnership make them easier to relate to, whether as a couple or as individuals? Is there an aspect of their relationship that resonates with you?
4. Why do you think Sarah is the only woman in the Bible to receive a new name from God?
5. Rabbi Steinsaltz refers to dual relationships, legal-biological and personal-spiritual. How do these relationships come into play for Abraham and Sarah? And for their relationships to the Jewish people? Which, in your opinion, is more significant when viewing Abraham and Sarah as a patriarch and matriarch? Do you agree with Rabbi Steinsaltz that both relationships were necessary for Abraham and Sarah to truly become the parents of the new nation?
6. If you have previously read the biblical passages about Hagar's banishment and Abraham's renouncement of Sarah to Abimelech, did the explanations given in this chapter for Sarah's behavior alter how you think of these incidents? How so?
7. Of all of the questions around Sarah's life, why do you think Rabbi Steinsaltz chose to focus on her partnership with Abraham?
8. What do you think of the idea that the matriarchs determined their family's fate and succession? Rabbi Steinsaltz writes, "Here the patriarchs were subordinate: it was not they who made the decisions, and it was not they who determined the shape of the great future" (p 17). Do you agree that this is the case? If so, what does that say about the roles of mothers in a larger sense?